

# **NEWS**

***for immediate release***

September 3, 1999

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## **Mosquito Activity On The Increase, ADHS Warns**

Following the discovery of mosquito samples that were positive for encephalitis viruses in the past two months, the Arizona Department of Health Services (ADHS) has urged all Arizonans to take steps to prevent exposure to mosquitoes and the diseases they may carry.

"Encephalitis viruses are identified almost every year in mosquito samples collected and tested in Arizona," said Craig Levy, manager of the ADHS Vector-Borne & Zoonotic Disease Section. "However, this year we are seeing a significant increase in samples that have tested positive for mosquito-borne viruses in the central counties."

"People should be aware that the risk for transmission of mosquito-borne diseases may be on the increase, and that they should be taking steps to protect themselves from mosquito bites and to eliminate potential breeding sites around their homes," cautioned Levy.

State, federal, county, municipal and tribal health officials, routinely collect mosquito samples between May and October for disease surveillance. The Arizona State Laboratory confirmed that ten mosquito samples collected from sites in Maricopa County during July and August tested positive for western equine encephalitis (WEE) and one sample from central Pinal County tested positive for St. Louis encephalitis (SLE). WEE positive samples were found in Chandler, Gilbert, Tempe, and southwest Phoenix. However, health officials believe that the affected areas may be much broader. Meanwhile, vector control officials have stepped up their efforts in several affected areas to reduce the risk of mosquito-borne illnesses

SLE and WEE viruses can cause infection with inflammation of the brain and other parts of the central nervous system. WEE also can cause sickness in horses. Officials from the state Department of Agriculture said that a horse suspected of having WEE was euthanized in Wilcox last month, while a second WEE case in a horse is being investigated in Mesa.

"Many people assume that because we live in the desert, mosquito-borne diseases are not a problem for Arizona. However, higher numbers of mosquitoes have been documented, in part because of monsoon rains, but also because we have allowed our own backyards to turn into breeding grounds," Levy said, adding that bird baths, kiddie pools, dog dishes, planters, old tires, cans, buckets and other containers left outside can collect water and breed mosquitoes.

Levy warned that several species of mosquitoes that pose a health risk to people are present in Arizona, such as Culex mosquitoes, which can carry SLE and WEE; the Aedes aegypti mosquito, which carries the potential risk for dengue fever in southern Arizona; and the Anopheles mosquito, a potential carrier of malaria.

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Locally acquired cases of dengue fever and malaria have not occurred in Arizona in decades. However, there is a risk for local transmission of dengue in southern Arizona since the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito has become commonplace in many communities, mostly due to backyard breeding.

ADHS has issued the following guidelines to minimize the risk of mosquito-borne illnesses:

- ◆ Eliminate standing water, which allows mosquitoes to breed. Check for items outside the home that collect water, such as old tires, cans, bottles, jars, buckets, drums and other containers.
- ◆ Change water in flower vases, birdbaths, planters, and animal watering pans twice a week.
- ◆ Repair leaky pipes and outside faucets, and move air conditioner drain hoses frequently.
- ◆ Avoid bites when going outside at night in areas where mosquitoes are present by using insect repellent, and by wearing lightweight clothing that covers the arms and legs.

For more information about mosquito-borne diseases, contact the ADHS Vector-Borne & Zoonotic Disease Section at (602) 230-5919.